

HISTORY

— OF THE —

TOWNSHIP OF RANSOM,

Hillsdale County,

MICHIGAN.

July 4th, A. D., 1876,

—BY—

SAMUEL B. BROWN.

HISTORY OF RANSOM.

Its Formation—Early Settlement—Early Settlers—Population—Statistics, &c., &c.

In compliance with the act of Congress, requesting that a historical oration of each township be delivered in each township July 4th, 1876, and by request of the Governor, the following historical sketch of the township of Ransom was compiled and delivered at the celebration at Ransom, July 4th, by Samuel B. Brown, of that township:

PERIOD FIRST,

Extended from the creation of the world to the discovery of America by Columbus, A. D. 1492.

"In the beginning, God created the Heavens and the Earth—"

Geologists and Moses may settle the time, included in this period of our history. Our object is accomplished when we record the fact that Ransom was a portion of this earth.

PERIOD SECOND,

Extends from the discovery of America by Columbus unto the settlement of this country by the Pilgrims, at Plimouth, Massachusetts, A. D., 1620.

During the time included in this second period of our history, various and numerous expeditions for the exploration and settlement of the continent of North America, sailed from different countries of Europe. The expedition that sailed in the *May Flower*, and landed on Plymouth rock, became a success, and North America was settled by the race of men that now inhabit it, in Latitude $41^{\circ} 50'$ north and in Longitude $7^{\circ} 30'$ west from Washington, and you will be in Ransom, thus showing Ransom to be included in and forming a part of North America.

PERIOD THIRD,

Extends from the settlement of the country, A. D., 1620, until the Declaration of the Independence of the United of America July 4, A. D. 1776.

The success attending the settlement in Massachusetts, stimulated settlements in other portions of the country, and by other countries. England, France and Germany, vied with each other in their efforts to get possession of the country and effect settlements, the English occupied New England and the Atlantic coast generally as far south as Georgia. The Dutch discovered the Hudson river, and effected settlement at New York, and as far up the river as Albany. The French discovered the St. Lawrence river and effected settlement at various points and on the upper lakes, and established a line of trading posts from Lake Erie to the Ohio river and the Mississippi river to New Orleans, and were in possession of the country in the region of the lakes and the valleys of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, as early as the fore part of the eighteenth century. Previous to July 4, 1776, England by treaty stipulations and wars, had got possession, and exercised jurisdiction over the St. Lawrence and the great lakes,

the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, and the lands adjoining the same. The various colonies of Great Britain that took part in the Declaration of Independence, claimed as their territory all the country south and west of the St. Lawrence and the great lakes—thus Ransom was included in the Declaration of Independence.

PERIOD FOURTH,

Extends from the Declaration of Independence in 1776, unto the admission of Michigan as a State into the Union, in January 1837.

During the first ten years following the Declaration of Independence, no mention is made of our immediate locality, but on the 13th day of July 1787, an ordinance for the government of the territory of the United States north-west of the river Ohio, was passed in Congress. In Congress, Aug. 7, 1789, an act was passed regulating the intercourse between the territorial officers and the general government. In Congress, May 8, 1792, an act conferring additional powers upon territorial officers was passed. In Congress, Jan. 11, 1805, an act to divide the Indian territory into two separate governments was passed, this act set off from the other Indian territory, the land north of the southern extremity of lake Michigan, and lying between lake Michigan and lake Erie, and extending north to the northern boundary of the United States into a separate territory and called it Michigan, with the seat of government at Detroit. Settlements of the territory of Michigan progressed slowly for many years; an unfavorable impression that the country was swampy and unfit for cultivation prevailed to a large extent. At the date of the admission of Michigan to the Union as a State, the population did not exceed, according to the U. S. census, 40,000, and among them was Rowland Bird and family of Ransom, the first and only white inhabitant of this town.

PERIOD FIFTH,

Extends from January 1837, the date of the admission of Michigan into the Union until July 4, A. D. 1876.

With the present period of our history commenced active operation in the settlement of Ransom. Rowland Bird, a native of Massachusetts, who had

previously lived in Wayne county New York; in the year 1832, in October, moved into Michigan, and located in the town of Sylvania, now in the State of Ohio. From Sylvania he came to Ransom, where he arrived March 8, 1836. With him came his wife and seven children, four daughters and three sons; also a young man, by the name of Leander Candee, as a man of all all work; what his wages were, or for what he served, the only record we have is, that four years after, to-wit., March 1840, he took to wife Lorida Bird, and no doubt considered himself amply repaid for all the privations and hardships he had endured.

For one or two years Mr. Bird's family's only neighbors were the wild animals, with which the forests abounded, and an occasional traveler in search of a location to settle. The next family in town was Orrin Cobb's, on the west town line; he was soon followed by a number of families, and in the spring of 1840 the inhabitants of the town numbered about one hundred, and measures were taken to organize the town. On the sixth day of April 1840, an election of township officers was held at the house of Alexander Palmer, on section four in town eight south of range two west, and the town was named Rowland, and included town eight and fraction nine, running south to the State line.

The township record furnish the following particulars.

Inspectors of election—Rowland Bird, Orin Cobb, Rufus Rathburn, and Joseph Howe.

Clerk—Thomas Burt.

Number of votes polled was eighteen. For Supervisor, Leander Candee received 18. For Town Clerk, Israel S. Hodges received 18. For Treasurer, Rowland Bird received 18. For Assessor, Matthew Armstrong, Rowland Bird and Orin Cobb received each 18. For Collector, Alexander Palmer received 18. For School Inspectors, Matthew Armstrong, Israel S. Hodges and James H. Babcock received 18. For Directors of the Poor, Joseph Howe and William Phillips received each 18 votes. For Commissioners of Highways, James H. Babcock, Alexander Palmer, and Henry Cornell received 18. For Justice of the Peace, Rowland Bird, James H.

Babcock, Matthew Armstrong and Henry Cornell received each 18. For Constables, Alexander Palmer, Joseph Phillips, Amos S. Drake and Alexander Findley received 18 votes.

There were twenty-eight officers and eighteen voters, there being more officers than voters; but one ticket was put in the field. In 1841 there being more voters than officers, two tickets were run, and the parties were very evenly divided; for Supervisor Nelson Doty received 17 votes, and Leander Candee received 16 votes; the candidates for Clerk received 16 votes each.

In 1848, the record reads—the township of Ransom, formerly Rowland, June 4, 1849, recorded as Bird, formerly Ransom. April 13, 1850, the record reads—township of Bird. April 26, 1850 it reads—township of Ransom. We have seen maps of Michigan in which this town is called Fenton, but it appears nowhere on the records of the town. The name of Ransom has continued uninterrupted since 1850, and now holds the town by right of possession. The first town meeting voted to raise \$25 to be used as a bounty for killing wolves, and the same sum as bounty money for killing bears. \$125 was voted for township expenses. Of the twenty-eight names mentioned in connection with the first township meeting but two are living in town at present, viz., Thomas Burt and Alexander Palmer. The first framed building in town was a barn built by Rowland Bird, in 1838, men coming as far as from Jonesville to the raising. The first school taught in town was by Lucinda Bird, in a shanty on the north west quarter of section eight, on the land now owned by Geo. W. Boothe, in the summer of 1838; three families sent to school, Mr. Cobb, Mr. Hodges and Mr. Bird. The first school house was built in district No. 2, near the sight of the present house, in 1839 or 1840. The first frame school house was built in 1844, in district No. 7, on the site now occupied by the brick one in said district. There are eight school houses in town at present, three brick and five frame buildings. The first birth that occurred in this town was a child of Mr. and Mrs. James H. Babcock, in 1839. The first death was Allen Bird, March 8, 1839, just three years from the day Mr. Bird arrived in

town; his age was sixteen. The first sermon preached was at the funeral of Allen Bird, and was preached by the Rev. Mr. Ambler, of Osseo. The first marriage was Jane Drake, daughter of Deacon Drake, in the south part of the town (now Amboy) in 1839.

The organization of Ransom in comparison of other towns in the county, it was one of the last, the first town organization affecting this town was Mosco in 1835; it included towns 5, 6, 7, 8, and fraction 9, south of range 2 west. In 1837 Jefferson was organized as Florida, and for three years Florida exercised a fatherly care over this town, laying out roads, collecting taxes etc. Woodbridge was organized the same year this town was, and in 1841 Cambria was organized; Wright, in 1838 was organized as Canaan, and the first settlers in Ransom lived not far from the land of Canaan. In 1850 Amboy was organized as a town made up of one tier of sections from town 8, south 2 west, and one tier from 8 south 3 west, and fractionals 9 south 2 west, and 9 south 3 west, which leaves Ransom a fractional town with 30 sections instead of 36.

In 1839, we have already mentioned that one son of Mr. Bird's died. In April 1840; within two months of the time she was married, Mrs. Candee, his eldest daughter, died April 9th, the same day Eunice Bird, his youngest daughter, died, both of scarlet fever. September 18, 1840, Mr. Bird's youngest son died, aged six years. September 22, four days after the death of his son, Rowland Bird died, aged 47 years. Of the remainder of the family two are now living, Mrs. Nelson Doty, of Ransom, and her sister in Sylvania, Ohio.

The spiritual wants of the inhabitants of Ransom have not wholly been neglected; churches have been organized, meeting houses built, and the gospel brought within the reach of all the inhabitants. There are five meeting houses in town, the First Congregational, erected in 1855; the next the Methodist Episcopal; the Seventh Day Advents have a house, and the United Brethren have two houses in town, with arrangements made for building a third. There is no place in town where intoxicating liquors are sold as a beverage, and never has been, except it was sold clandestinely. The first

church organization was the Congregational church, organized May 19, 1848.

In this history it will be impossible to specify year by year the improvements made, or the increase of population; but by a comparison of the present with forty years ago, we shall arrive at the facts in the case. In 1835, forty years ago, Ransom was an unbroken forest, not one acre of cleared land, but all heavy timber. Of the 19,185 acres of land in Ransom, 12,074 acres are improved, 2,111 acres are included in the highways and partial improvements, and 5,000 acres are wood. The improvements including highways average nine acres to every inhabitant of the town. Forty years ago people traveling in Ransom with a team had to cut and clear a road, to-day there are in Ransom seventy miles of highway, occupying 559 acres of land. The inhabitants of Ransom have invested in their highways a capital of \$70,400, and are expending annually \$2,000 in repairing their highways. (It is no part of this history to state whether the roads are as good as the investment ought to furnish.) Forty years ago there was not a rod of fence in Ransom; to-day there are 429 miles of fence, at 50 cents a rod is \$169 a mile, making \$67,200, the cost of fences, not including any repairs. Forty years ago there was one dwelling house in Ransom, to-day there are 341; then there was one family, to-day there are 346; then there were ten inhabitants in town latest statistics give us 1,539. The census of 1874 furnish us with items of interest, some of which we will record. In 1873 1,962 acres of wheat were harvested in Ransom, yielding 24,871 bushels, 13 bushels per acre; 1,852 acres of corn were harvested, yielding 99,660 bushels of ears, 54 bushels an acre. In 1874 there were 522 acres of apple orchards in Ransom; sheep 1,848; hogs 1,138; horses 577; mules 5; oxen 46; cows 886; wool sheared in 1873, 16,079 lbs; pork sold 183,504 lbs; cheese made 49,882 lbs; butter made 89,580 lbs. In comparing the productions of Ransom in 1873 with the productions of Hillsdale county in 1840, we have the following results in 1840: Hillsdale county produced 80,250 bushels of wheat; Ransom in 1873 produced 24,871 bushels of wheat; in 1840 the county produced 82,757

bushels of corn; Ransom in 1873 produced 99,660 bushels of corn. The dairy product of Hillsdale County in 1840 was worth \$5,623; the dairy product of Ransom in 1873 was \$21,152,75.

The earlier settlers were all on an equal footing, all lived in log houses, all chopped and cleared land; all shot wild animals; all had their axe and gun, the strife among them was who should make the largest clearing. It is said that history repeats itself, and I shall state the situation correctly if I quote from Sacred History: "A man was famous according as he had lifted up his axe against the thick trees." Ransom abounded in men of fame. It is within the recollection of the grown up boys and girls to-day, who had the first carpet on their floor; who had the first framed house; who had the first buggy; who had the first mowing machine; the first s-wing machine, or the first melodeon. But not one of them can tell how many of these articles there are in town to-day, for they have ceased numbering them. Those early days were not without their recreations. Raisings, loggings, huskings, and quiltings were recreations, and the fiddle the only musical instrument, in town was available in every house as occasion required. When they got married some paid the justice in money, some in work, some got trusted, and some paid a broom.

The genius of our people was always equal to all emergencies, many a family has wintered in a house without a door, or window, or lower floor; the way they managed, they put the stove and bed in the chamber and lived up there. The bear and wolf were kept from the door in the day time with the rifle; and from the bed side in the night by drawing the ladder into the chamber. When one of our first settlers wanted sash for the windows of his new log house he got up in the morning and started for Jonesville, following Indian trails, and blazed trees, arrived at his destination he bought his sash for five windows, paid for them every cent of money he had, strung them on his arms and turned his steps homeward where he arrived late in the evening, not having eaten a mouthful since he left home in the morning. Another man wanting some oats for seed took with him his boy

thirteen years old and started; he got his oats two or three miles this side of Hudson; he took two bushels his boy one, putting them on their shoulders they started for home; between two and three o'clock they came in sight of the house, and that boy laid his bag on the ground and laid down on it the tiredest he ever was. When those oats were sown they were not wild oats. These incidents show how the first settlers lived. Some of the first settlers bought their land of the government, but most of them bought second hand. Only three or four now living in town received their deeds from the government, two are Gilbert Howland, and Thomas Burt.

This town has had sixteen different supervisors, nine served one year each, four served two years each, two served five years, and one served ten years. There has been levied upon the town for incidental expenses an average of \$190.00 a year since its organization; the largest sum was \$300., the smallest was \$25. The town of Ransom is square with the world owing no one, and no one owing them. At the organization of the town, 23 officers served the town, now 16 officers fill the bill. The duties formerly performed by six officers are now executed by the supervisor, and one man does the duties of Commissioner of Highways.

The first resident Physician in Ransom, was Dr. Lee. The first store in Ransom, was kept by Dr. Lee, in 1851. The first store in Ransom village, was kept by Ichabod Stedman, in 1855. A Post Office was first established in Ransom in 1847; A. T. Kimball was Post master, residence on Section 9; mail once a week. The first sawmill in town was built by Mr. Gay, in south part of town, now in Amboy. Grist mills, the town has never had but a short time, not long enough to get used to it. The inhabitants of this town go to Amboy, Pioneer, Cambria, Jefferson, Wright or Hillsdale to mill. The first settlers used to go to Tecumseh with their grists.

Ransom has had her share of fires. Some ten or twelve families have lost their dwellings, and all or part of their household goods and provisions. C. B. Shepard met with the first loss of this kind in the fall of 1841 in Oct.; with the lumber he had drawn from

Keene, north of Hudson, for floors and doors to his house. He had built a shanty in which he slept, cooked his meat and potatoes, and stored his effects. He left Saturday afternoon for Adams, to spend the Sabbath, and on his return to bring a load of goods. On Monday when he returned his lumber for his new house was gone, and he mistrusted it was burned; from what he could discover he suspected the powder he left in the bottom of the boiler, that was full of tin pans and cooking utensils, had exploded for the woods about there was full of tin twisted and torn in all manner of shapes. And his suspicions were confirmed by folks living within five or six miles having heard an explosion in that direction about sundown Saturday. He never sees a piece of crooked tin but he thinks of the powder he lost. He kept on in the even tenor of his way as best he could after what had happened, and on the 14th day of December, 1841 moved his family into his new house, and for the want of lower floor, doors and windows, he lived up stairs the first winter.

Death by accident has occurred in a number of instances. In 1851 Mr. Featherly was killed by a falling limb, while in the woods east of Danforth Bugbees Corners. In 1860 Mr. Joles was killed by lightning; not far from that time old Mr. Siddle was killed while falling a tree, in the southwest part of the town. A young man by the name of Ward was killed by falling onto a pitch fork, in the south part of the town. The explosion of a steam boiler in a saw mill on the farm of Charles Burt, in the southeast part of the town in 1872 killed four and injured a number of others. In the northeast part of the town, violent death by premeditated violence, occurred Feb. 6th, 1876; Horace A. Burnett was the victim, Jacob Stevick the criminal.

The great event, the one that most effected Ransom of any that ever occurred, was the rebellion. Ransom with a population in 1860 of 1,159, and with possibly 300 liable to military duty, furnished for the army during the war, for the preservation of the union, one hundred and forty-three (143.) These one hundred and forty-three men, in the language of Jephtha, "put their lives in their hands and passed

over against the enemy." Forty of this number laid down their lives for their country. Many of them lay in far off and unknown graves. In the Fourth Michigan Infantry, the first regiment that went from this vicinity, enlisted as three months men, and which took part in the first Bull Run, five went from this town; their names were James Tarsney, Riley Ainsworth, Hiram Hartson, Ira Williams and Avery Randall. April 15, 1861, the day the call was made for 75,000 men, James Tarsney was in Hillsdale, from Ransom, and enlisted. April 16 Riley Ainsworth, Hiram L. Hartson, Ira Williams and Avery Randall, enlisted, being the first from Ransom. Of this number Hiram Hartson only came back, the others died in the service of the country. Eleven years have passed away, the great openings made by the war are closed up, and we have almost forgotten that there was a war, but for the record kept by our war supervisor, the late Warren McCutcheon, we should have had no account of many of Ransom's citizens who went into the war.

We have no data from which we can ascertain the number of births or deaths that have occurred in Ransom since the settlement of the town, but from statistics taken of late years we learn that one birth occurs to every thirty-one inhabitants; and that one death occurs to every seventy inhabitants annually.

How many trees were planted on the fifteenth of April last, in response to the proclamation of Governor Bagley, I am not able to state, but that many trees were planted on that day is a part of this history.

On this one hundredth anniversary of our Nation's existence, while Uncle

Samuel with representatives of all the families of this nation and with invited guests from every nation on the earth, is holding a celebration at the old homestead in Philadelphia, in the very room where his existence began, or in the language of another, "where he is holding his second Golden Wedding at the old homestead," we in Ransom are celebrating the Fortieth Anniversary since the settlement of Ransom, and the Fortieth Anniversary since the admission of Michigan into the Union, or in other words are celebrating our 'Woolen Wedding.'

When I shall have recorded the programme of the proceedings of this day my work as historian will be finished.

CELEBRATION IN RANSOM JULY 4, 1876.

President of the Day—Napoleon Clark.

Vice Presidents—William H. H. Pettit, of Ransom; C. D. Luce, of Jefferson; Edward Carroll, of Pittsford; George Likely and Leonidas Hubbard, of Wright; William Drake, of Amboy; Peter Hewitt, of Woodbridge.

Field Marshal—Richard Hart.

Ground Marshal—T. C. Baker.

Chaplain—Rev. Mr. Stout.

Reader of the Declaration—Alfred Hart.

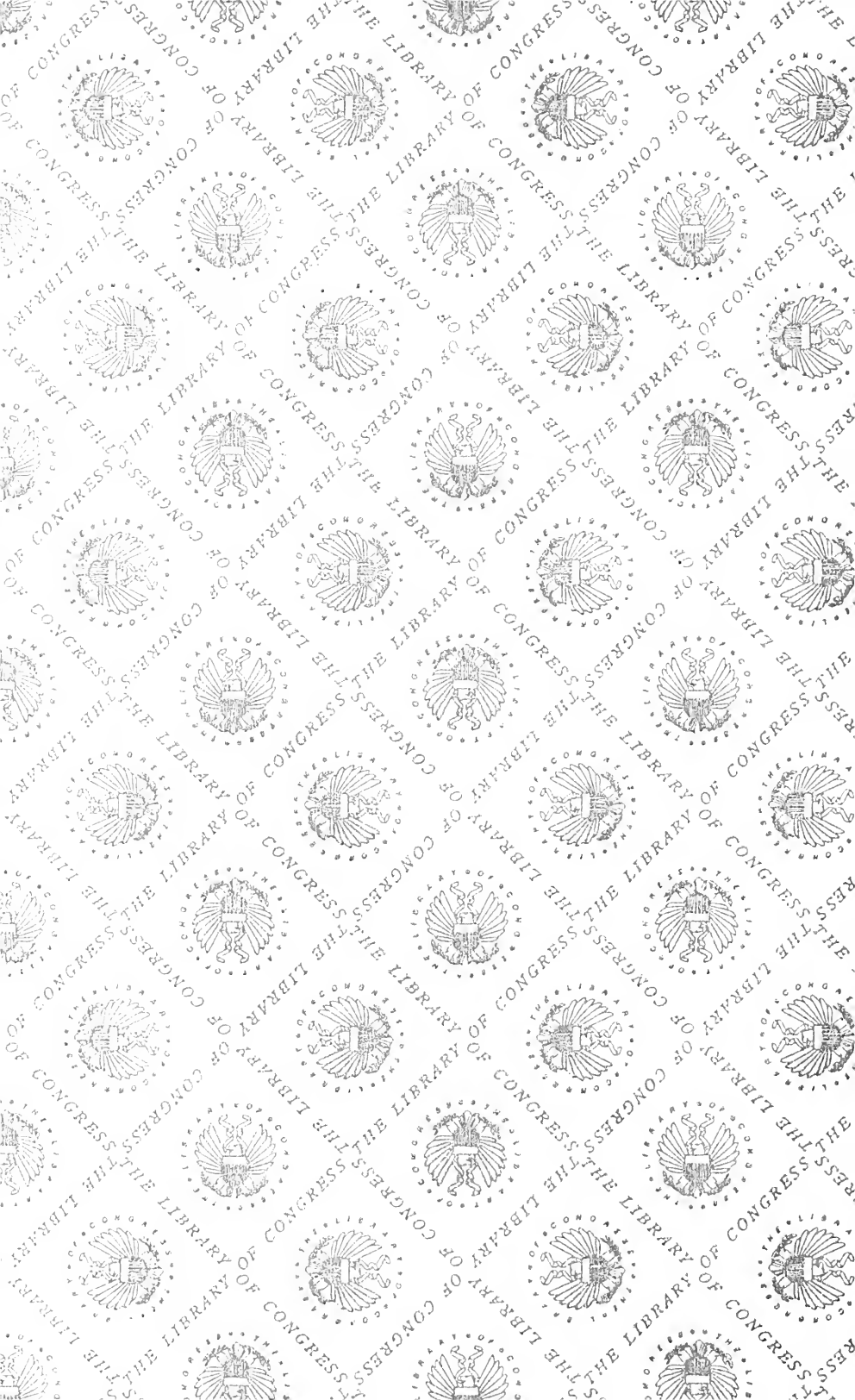
Orator—Rev. D. A. Ide.

Historian—Samuel B. Brown.

Music by Marshal Band from Pioneer.

Procession to form and march to the grove at ten o'clock a. m., after literary exercises refreshments, the afternoon to be devoted to various sports; in the evening grand torch-light procession and fire works. The fifth period of our history is closed.

SAMUEL B. BROWN,
Historian.



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